

SMALL POX AMONG THE INDIANS

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**LETTER**

FROM

**THE SECRETARY OF WAR,**

*Upon the subject of the Small Pox among the Indian tribes.*

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MARCH 30, 1832.

Read, and referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs.

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DEPARTMENT OF WAR,

March 29, 1832.

SIR: In compliance with the resolutions of the House of Representatives of the 26th instant, I have the honor to transmit copies of letters received at the department "upon the subject of the spread and ravages of the small pox among any of the Indian tribes," and in relation to "existing or threatened hostilities between any of the Indian tribes."

I have the honor to be,

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

LEW. CASS.

Hon. ANDREW STEVENSON,

*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

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*Documents in regard to the Small Pox among the Indians.*

CANTONMENT LEAVENWORTH,

October 29, 1831.

SIR: I have the honor to inform you that I have returned from a visit to the four Pawnee villages, all of whom I found in a most deplorable condition; indeed their misery defies all description. Judging from what I saw during the four days I spent with, and the information I received from the chiefs and two Frenchmen who reside with and speak their language well, I am fully persuaded that one-half of the whole number of souls of

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each village have, and will be carried off by this cruel and frightful distemper. They told me that not one under thirty-three years of age escaped the monstrous disease—it having been that length of time since it visited them before.

They were dying so fast, and taken down at once in such large numbers, that they had ceased to bury their dead, whose bodies were to be seen, in every direction, laying about in the river, lodged on the sand bars, in the hog weeds around their villages, and in their corn caches; others again were dragged off by the hungry dogs into the prairie, where they were torn to pieces by the more hungry wolves and buzzards. Their misery was so great and so general, that they seemed to be unconscious of it, and to look upon the dead and dying as they would on so many dead horses.

I presented them with the few presents which I had taken with me for that purpose, and, strange to tell, such was their love of the articles of civilized man, that a smile seemed to pass for a moment over their haggard visages. They requested me to inform their Great Father how much they thanked him for sending them a pipe of tobacco in a moment of such dire distress. They stated that their neighbors, the Otoes and Omahas, were receiving an annuity from their Great Father for some wild lands, and that he had surveyed off a portion of Pawnee land, and given it to his Delaware children, for which they hoped he would have pity on his Pawnee children also, and do for them as he was doing for his Otoe and Omaha children.

I am, very respectfully, sir,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN DOUGHERTY,

*Indian Agent.*

Gen. WM. CLARK,

*Sup't Indian Affairs.*

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MAUMEE, WOOD COUNTY, OHIO,

March 16, 1832.

SIR: The present is to inform you that a report has prevailed here that the small pox has been raging, for some time past, among the Pattawatomies and other Indian tribes, of which disease many have died. And being apprehensive, from the connexion existing between the Ottawas and them, the infection might be caught by that tribe; in my official character, I beg leave to inform you, and submit to your better consideration, whether it would not be prudent to call a council, on their return from their winter pursuits, and have them vaccinated, in order to prevent the desolating ravages of this dreadful disorder; and to inquire if Government would defray the expense if the Indians refused?

I have the honor to be,

With great respect,

Your obedient servant,

JAMES JACKSON,

*Indian Agent, Ottawas, Maumee*

Hon. LEWIS CASS,

*Secretary of War.*

STROTHER'S HOTEL,

*Washington, March 23, 1832.*

SIR: The claims of humanity, in a case *peculiarly* affecting, compel me to ask leave to trouble you with this. I have this moment received information from Mr. Lykins, near Kanza river, dated February 25, that Major J. Dougherty believed that among the Pawnees, Otoes, Omahas, and Poncahs, more than *four thousand* persons had already died of the small pox. Of the three latter tribes, about one hundred and sixty had died when the disease was checked by vaccination. Major Dougherty (who is U. S. Indian agent for upper Missouri,) thinks that all the mountain tribes, as well as the Sioux and other northern Indians, will contract the disease, unless measures should speedily be taken to prevent it.

Major Dougherty's thorough acquaintance with that upper country, and his known fidelity, entitle his opinions to the fullest confidence. May I entreat your *early* consideration of this subject, and be allowed, most respectfully, to suggest the inquiry whether means could not *speedily* be adopted to arrest this destroying plague by vaccination? These Indians would submit to the operation, and, if the necessary protection of the Government could be afforded, men would be found who would penetrate the forests in search of every horde of these despairing sufferers, for no higher reward than the satisfaction derived from the circumstance of having rescued thousands of men and women and children from this awful calamity.

I am, most respectfully, sir,

Your obedient servant,

ISAAC McCOY.

Hon. LEWIS CASS,  
*Secretary of War.*

STROTHER'S HOTEL,

*Washington, March 27, 1832.*

SIR: B. B. Kercheval, esq. who is now in this city, and who is lately from the Lake country, has informed me that the small pox is raging among the Indians between Lake Michigan and Mississippi. A considerable number have died at Milwaukee and other places. The Indian agents had used, and were using, every means to check its progress, and, in some degree, had succeeded by vaccination. Nevertheless, it was spreading, and had reached Rock river before he left that country. He thinks the destruction among the Winnebagoes must be awful, and it must necessarily become no less so among the tribes adjoining on the north and west.

Mr. Kercheval, as is known to you, is an intelligent gentleman, well acquainted with those Indians, and with the country in which they reside; so that there is not the possibility of mistake in this matter.

With great respect, sir,

Your obedient servant,

ISAAC McCOY.

Hon. LEWIS CASS, *Secretary of War.*



*Documents in regard to hostilities between the Indian tribes.*

U. S. INDIAN AGENCY,

*Prairie des Chiens, Nov. 15, 1831.*

SIR: Deeply impressed with the importance to the Government, of a full, correct, and faithful account of all transactions affecting the peace of the frontiers, either happening among the Indians or white men on their border, I hope you will excuse me for again calling your attention to circumstances relating to the killing of two Sioux, near the head of Terre Bleu, about the 25th of July last, by the Sacs and Foxes.

By the same mail that I informed you of this affair, I, at the request of Major Taliaferro, addressed Mr. St. Vrain on the same subject. Under date of the 26th September, Mr. St. Vrain says "your statement, in reference to the affair between the Sacs and Sioux, differs, in some respects, from the report made by the Sacs. They say they were only three in company, and perceived two Sioux in a prairie within the limits of the Sac and Fox lands hunting buffalo. One of the Sacs went towards the Sioux with professions of friendship, but the Sioux threw their blankets and breast cloths off, and shot him. The other two Sacs, (who had been concealed from the Sioux,) immediately pursued them, and killed both Sioux. They also say that they had no war party."

The motive that, at this moment, induces me to renew this subject to you, arises from an anxious desire that any information which reaches the Government, and on which important measures may be predicated, should be strictly correct. The Sioux Indians have been to me, and told me their tale. A white man, recently from the vicinity of the place where the affair took place, gives me an account corresponding strictly with the Sioux story, and I am compelled, from all the circumstances, to believe the statements made by them. You have the Sac and Fox version above, and which I presume Mr. St. Vrain has previously laid before you. The following is the corroborated account of the Sioux. Four Sioux were hunting in a prairie, near the head of the Terre Bleu river, at a place called by the Indians, "the Hill that stands up," about 70 or 80 miles north of the line of the land sold to the United States at Prairie des Chiens last year. They were surprised by ten Sacs or Foxes coming rapidly and unexpectedly upon them. The Sioux fled, and the Sacs fired and killed two of them. The remaining two Sioux turned, fired and killed one Sac or Fox, and effected their escape to the nearest encampment of Sioux. This is a plain unvarnished tale, with great probabilities on its side. The account transmitted by Mr. St. Vrain has several improbabilities to encounter, and some contradictions to reconcile or explain. Why have they not given the place where the affair occurred, that our knowledge of the geography of the country might aid us in determining on whose lands it took place? If there were only two Sioux, and both killed in the Sac and Fox country, how did the Sioux get such early information of the fact and the accompanying particulars? "The dead tell no tales." The first news of this meeting was carried in a very short time to St. Peters, and thence reached this place and St. Louis. This shows it was north of this place, (Prairie des Chiens;) and the Sac and Fox line, after it leaves the Mississippi 30 miles, lies near-

ly on a line with this place, running west to the Des Moines, which it crosses 80 or 90 miles below, or south of its head. And the Terre Blue river heads directly north of the head of the Des Moines. There is little doubt, from all the information I have collected and compared, that the meeting was from 70 to 80 miles within the lines of the Sioux country, and 110 or 120 miles north of the extreme northern limit of the Sac and Fox country, as the United States own 40 miles wide between the two nations. Your own knowledge of the geography of the country, and the manners and habits of the Indians, on comparing the accounts and the evidence on which they rest, will convince you of the improbability of the truth of the Sac and Fox account of this difference.

Major Taliaferro has no doubt fully apprised you of the state of feeling in which he left the Sioux, and the course it indicated, if left to themselves. To me, recently, they hold language like this: "The treaty of 1830 has been broken. Our land has been invaded, and our people killed while quietly hunting meat for their families. We want satisfaction. Our fathers at Prairie des Chiens told us, if we were struck, not to revenge it; but to leave it to our great father the President, and he would see justice done us. We tell you now, that we will be quiet until the waters flow again in the spring. Then if our great father does not see justice done to us, we will wait no longer. We will revenge our brother warriors." A corresponding spirit is evinced by the Menominees, as I have previously apprised you. I have not seen them latterly. The Chippeways sent for them, and they are now up Chippeway river, where I presume satisfaction will be made by the Chippeways for killing the Menominees fall before last, and a combination formed against the Sacs and Foxes, of which the Chippeways will form a part. I mean the Chippeways of Chippeway river, and round the south of Lake Superior, and west of Michigan Lake.

I have used the utmost diligence to ascertain the ulterior views of the Menominees, in case the Government may not attend to the subject before the opening of the waters in spring. The plan of the intended combination against the *general enemies*, as they call the Sacs and Foxes, appears to be this:

The band of the Menominees on the Mississippi, (who have received considerable recruits from Green Bay,) are to hunt up the Mississippi on the Chippeway and Black river, above the falls. The Menominees of Green Bay, Winnebago lake, Fox river, Wolf and Menominee rivers, and the Ouisconsin, are to hunt on Wolf river, the Ouisconsin and upper part of Black river, (where, you may recollect, they, at the treaty of 1825, claimed a tract of country; and, in the spring, the whole nation are to come out at the falls of Black river. From thence, the squaws and children go across to the Ouisconsin, (where they leave their canoes this fall,) and thence to the Portage, and down Fox river to Green Bay. The warriors, with some Chippeways, with whom considerable intermarriages have taken place, proceed down Black river to the Mississippi, where, joined by the Sioux (and Winnebagoes, if they can prevail on them,) they will make up their war party, and descend in two columns on the Sauks and Foxes; one, by land, mounted, the other by water.

This information, gathered from several sources of a *confidential* character, in part, when put together, is too probable to admit of a doubt as to its correctness. Receiving it therefore as the present projected plan of the intended *war party*, I have deemed it my duty to lay it before you. There



seems to me but two things that reasonably could frustrate it. The *timely* and *effectual* intervention of the Government, and the want of proper sustenance for so large a combination such a length of time.

That the Government can arrest this impending storm, stop the effusion of blood, and turn back the torrent of threatened war, I have no doubt. The Menominees and Sioux still implore the effectual interference of the Government, and ask it as a right under the engagements of the treaty of 1830. They say they will wait and see what their great father will do for them, but they cannot wait longer than the opening of the rivers in the spring. If they do, there will be more Sacs and Foxes in the plains. They add, if the murderers of the Menominees and Sioux are not given up, we must revenge our dead.

I am of opinion, that, if the murderers of the Menominees were given up, and the affair of the Sioux inquired into and settled, peace might be restored. If not, I apprehend serious Indian wars in the spring. I think I have influence sufficient to save the Winnebagoes from any participation in them, unless struck upon. The *general enemies* seem to be regardless what nation they strike lately. I shall see all the principal Winnebago chiefs before long, and will exert myself to keep them quiet, and hope I shall succeed.

With great respect,

I remain your most obedient servant,

JOS. M. STREET,

*U. S. Indian agent.*

Gen. WM. CLARK,

*Superintendent Indian Affairs.*

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SUPERINTENDENCY OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,

*St. Louis, December 6, 1831.*

SIR: I have the honor to enclose to you, herewith, two letters from Gen. Street, of the 24th October and 15th November; the first relating to his embarrassed situation, in consequence of a judgment having been obtained against him and Major Kearney of the United States' army, by a Mr. Brunete, of Prairie des Chiens, and which he has not the means of satisfying.

As Gen. Street was acting under the laws, and in the execution of his duty, I would beg leave to recommend that he be reimbursed the amount he has expended in this suit; and, should an execution issue against him, I think he ought to be indemnified.

The information contained in Gen. Street's last letter is such as I have expected from the excited state of feeling among the tribes he mentions. This excitement has grown out of the attack made on the Menominees last summer by the Sacs and Foxes, and which has been aggravated by their killing two Sioux in the beginning of the fall. Measures should, in my opinion, before the opening of spring, be taken to prevent the meditated attack of the Sioux, Menominees, and Chippeways upon the Sacs and Foxes. These last having declared their inability to deliver up the offenders in the case of the Menominees, and, at the same time, their perfect willingness that justice should be done, I had entertained the hope that the agent might, in the course of the winter, have been enabled, with the assistance of the military, to have secured two or three of the murderers, which would, in all

probability, have led to the delivery of all concerned. The frequent absence, however, of agents from their posts, prevents any certain calculations which might be made of the kind; Mr. St. Vrain being now absent without permission.

I have the honor to be,  
With high respect,  
Your most obedient servant,  
WM. CLARK.

The Hon. LEWIS CASS,  
*Secretary of War.*

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SUPERINTENDENCY OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,  
*St. Louis, February 23, 1832.*

SIR: I take the liberty of enclosing, herewith, a letter from the Indian agent at Prairie du Chien, of 11th January, and two from the agent at Cantonment Leavenworth of 3d and 8th instant, on the subject of the hostile preparations of the Indians against each other. (All received by last mail.)

By the report of General Street, the Indians of the upper Mississippi seem determined on war against the Sacs and Foxes, if the murderers of the Menomonies at Prairie du Chien are not given up. And, from the report of Mr. Dougherty, it would appear that the Sacs and Foxes of the Mississippi had solicited aid of some of the Missouri tribes, and intended opposition. No information has been received from Mr. St. Vrain in relation to the hostile intentions of the Sacs: that agent sat out about the middle of the last month to the Sac and Fox hunting camps, high up the Desmoine and Ioway rivers, for the purpose of obtaining the surrender of the murderers of the Menomonies; or to learn the views and intentions of those tribes in regard to the demand which has already been made of them for those murderers; and also to learn the particulars in relation to the Sac killed by the Sioux in the early part of the winter. I have heard nothing from Mr. St. Vrain since he left his post.

With high respect,  
I have the honor to be,  
Your most obedient servant,  
WILLIAM CLARK.

E. HERRING, Esq.  
*Indian Department.*

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U. S. INDIAN AGENCY AT PRAIRIE DU CHIEN,  
*January 11, 1832.*

SIR: Anxious that the Government should be apprised of the earliest movements of the Indians; (Sioux, Menominees, and Winnebagoes,) I have taken measures to be regularly informed of their principal collections and encampments bordering on their southern frontier, and what they were doing; and shall, as occasion requires, give you the result of my information; and, from its source, it may be implicitly relied on.

The Sioux of the lower bands, the Waakpaycooties, and those near St. Peters, are collecting on Carmon and Root rivers; and, though engaged



in hunting, are passing wampum with Menominees, and evidently preparing for a spring campaign against the Sacs and Foxes, and have, in their encampments, declared as much.

The Menominees are collecting from the Lakes, between Black and Chippewa rivers; not far from the falls of the former, they now have assembled to the number of about 300, and about 50 more are dispersed in the vicinity. The Chippewas are also near them, with whom a peace has been lately concluded. Their avowed intention is to go against the Sacs and Foxes in the spring, if the murderers of Prairie du Chien are not, before that time, given up. They have given wampum to the Sioux, which had already passed through the hands of the Ottawas and Pottawatamies, and is now gone among the upper Sioux.

These measures strongly indicate an extensive combination, which is gaining ground from an impression that the Government will not interfere. How this latter opinion has obtained credit, I am unable to find out; though it is traced to the Menominees from Green Bay. The Winnebagoes continue to assure me they will not join in the war, so long as I advise them not. They say they made peace with the Sacs and Foxes, and promised to be at peace to their G. F. at St. Louis, and will keep their word.

I can only remark, in much haste, that the information now given, in conjunction with that previously forwarded, will show the necessity of an early interference, if any is intended.

In a conversation with Col. Morgan, I understood him to say that he would not feel authorized to use force against Indians going to war with each other any distance from this place.

I have the honor to be, sir,

Your most obedient servant,

JOS. M. STREET,

*U. S. Indian agent.*

Gen. WM. CLARK,

*Superintendent Indian Affairs at St. Louis.*

CANTONMENT LEAVENWORTH, Feb. 3, 1832.

SIR: Major R. P. Beauchamp has just returned from the Ottoo blacksmith shop; at which place he had an interview with Iaton, the principal chief of the Ottoes, who informed him that the Sac and Fox Indians of the Mississippi had sent an invitation to the Ottoes and Ioways, and to the Sacs of Missouri, to join them in war against the Americans.

The Iaton said, as a friend to the whites, he gave this information with a view of putting them on their guard. He further informed Major B., that the Ottoes, Ioways, and Sacs of Missouri, had all, without hesitation, refused to accept the invitation, or to have any thing to do in a combination of any kind whatever against the American people.

I give you this information, believing it my duty; although it is probable, should there be any truth in this report, that you have ere this been apprized of it by way of the Mississippi.

I have the honor to be,

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

JNO. DOUGHERTY, *Ind. Agent.*

Gen. WM. CLARK, *Superin't Indian Affairs.*



CANTONMENT LEAVENWORTH,

*February 8, 1832.*

SIR: Mr. Sarpy arrived at this post last night from Mr. Cabannie's trading establishment, and informed me that Mr. C. had received a letter from Mr. Laidlow, giving intelligence that a party of Sioux had recently fallen in with Mr. Leclere, who was on his way from the Ponkaws to the little Missouri with seven horses loaded with Indian goods; and that they not only robbed him of his goods, but killed all his horses.

I understand that the small pox has nearly subsided among the Omahas. The Pankaws, however, are still suffering from it.

I have the honor to be,

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN DOUGHERTY,

*Indian Agent.*

Gen. WM. CLARK,

*Sup't Indian Affairs.*

